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ABSTRACT

A national mail survey examined the experiences of beginning vocational teachers. The survey had three sections: demographics, a list of assistance items, and a list of events. The latter two sections had two scales: frequency of occurrence and degree of impact. The survey sought to determine the kinds of induction assistance that beginning vocational teachers perceived they needed and to compare perceptions to what they actually received in their first year. Of a total sample of 625 teachers, 352 returned usable responses. The proportion involved in beginning teacher assistance programs was dismally low--only 25 percent. Slightly over half reported having a mentor or buddy teacher assigned. Involvement was higher among nonteacher education certified teachers than teacher education certified teachers. The most frequently reported form of assistance was feedback and evaluation from the principal; almost a quarter did not receive a curriculum guide for organizing a course they had never taught. In general, the types of assistance that teachers regarded as important tended to be ones that are most frequently experienced. Positive experiences occurred much more frequently than negative experiences. Recommendations were that all beginning teachers be provided with curriculum guides and instructional materials; inservice programs be spread out over the year; and teachers be provided with released time for planning. (12 references) (YLB)

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A NATIONAL SURVEY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF BEGINNING VOCATIONAL TEACHERS

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Abstract

The research discussed in this paper is part of a larger study into the nature, dynamics, and scope of the induction process for beginning vocational teachers. In this portion of the study, a national survey was conducted to determine the kinds of induction assistance that beginning vocational teachers perceive they need and compare that to what they actually received in their first year. The results show that some assistance activities are occurring to some extent, but there are many forms of assistance that beginning vocational teachers think they need but are not receiving.

A NATIONAL SURVEY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF BEGINNING VOCATIONAL TEACHERS

Introduction

There is a growing research base to illuminate the induction problems successes, and needs of beginning teachers in general (Thies-Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1987; Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Huling-Austin, 1989), but little is available in the literature dealing with the induction process for beginning vocational teachers (Waters, 1988). Camp and Heath-Camp (1989) found that as many as one-fourth of the problems experienced by beginning vocational teachers are unique to vocational education. Their finding reinforces Gage's contention (1977) that for research in education to be optimally effective, it must be discipline-specific.

Scott (1988) contended that "One of the most critical issues facing vocational teacher educators ". . . is how to provide an induction program that will reduce the many problems confronting first-year vocational teachers, many of whom have little or no previous formal teacher training or college education."(p 99) He noted that all beginning vocational teachers have problems, but agreed with Bouchie (1987) that vocational teachers who enter the profession directly from business or industry with little or no pedagogical training have different problems. It is reasonable to expect that is true for the growing number of teachers entering vocational education through "alternative"

certification routes, with degrees in related technical disciplines and without teacher-education degrees.

Waters (1988) cited several major research programs on induction, particularly those conducted by the Educational Testing Service and the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education at the University of Texas at Austin. Unfortunately, none of that research dealt with vocational teachers. Growing out of those and other studies, a large number of induction assistance programs have been implemented (Huling-Austin, 1989). By far the most prominent form of induction assistance suggested is some form of mentoring. If induction programs for beginning teachers are to be planned and structured with consideration of the realities of the process, then they should be based on appropriate research, but that research has been lacking in vocational education. Thus, there is a clear and pressing need to examine the induction assistance needs of beginning vocational teachers.

Objective

This research is a part of a much larger project. The overall study is an examination of the nature, dynamics, and scope of the induction process for beginning vocational teachers. The project is funded through the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, University of California, Berkeley. The specific objective of the research being reported by this paper was to examine the experiences of beginning vocational teachers through a

national mail survey. More specifically the present research sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are beginning vocational teachers involved in induction assistance programs?.
2. What type of assistance activities do beginning vocational teachers experience and what impact do these experiences have on these beginning teachers?
3. With what frequency do beginning vocational teachers experience positive events and what impact do these positive experiences have on these beginning teachers?
4. With what frequency do beginning vocational teachers experience negative events and what impact do these negative experiences have on these beginning teachers?

Methodology

Instrumentation

No appropriate survey instrument was found in existence to meet the needs of this particular study. As indicated earlier, this was part of a larger project that also included extensive qualitative research. One component of that research consisted of a series of Nominal Group Technique (NGT) sessions with 10 purposefully-selected samples of beginning vocational teachers from eight different states. To provide the initial list of items for the survey instrument, we selected those experiences that

were identified as being of relatively high importance and which appeared repeatedly in those NGT sessions. In addition, the list of items was balanced against the existing literature on teacher induction to assure that nothing was omitted by the NGT teachers. The list consisted of 22 assistance activities and 41 positive and negative events.

The list of assistance items and events was developed into an instrument with three sections. The first section was for demographics, the second had the list of assistance items and the third had the list of events. Sections II and III had two scales: frequency of occurrence and degree of impact.

On the assistance section, The first scale "OCCURRED" asked the teachers whether they had experienced the particular form of assistance during their first year of teaching. The second scale "IMPACT" asked the teachers to rate the impact of the assistance item if it had occurred, or to estimate the degree of impact it would have had, had it occurred. The "OCCURRED" scale was in the form "yes/no." The "IMPACT" scale ranged from 0 = none, 1 = minor, 2 = moderate, 3 = major, and 4 = critical.

The events section of the survey also had two scales. The first scale measured "OCCURRENCE" and ranged from 0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = occasionally, 3 = often , and 4 = always. The second scale measured "IMPACT" in the same manner as the assistance part of the instrument.

To provide further validation, the draft instrument was submitted to three panels for review. The first was a panel of four teacher educators who regularly work with preservice and beginning vocational teachers. The second panel was a group of approximately 30 vocational teachers employed at a local high school. A few editorial changes were made from the suggestions of the first two review panels. The instrument was then field-tested with a group of beginning vocational teachers from one of the states that was not being selected to receive the survey (n = 23). These teachers received the survey by mail and were asked to complete the instrument and provide their comments on the completeness, accuracy, readability, and clarity of both the instructions and the assistance items. An examination of their responses revealed no systematic problems in the instrument.

For the purposes of this analysis, the OCCURRED scale on the assistance section of the instrument is a non-additive list of items which either occurred or did not. To the extent that the respondent's answer accurately reflects his or her experience, reliability of that part of the instrument can be taken to be stability and mechanical reliability. That form of reliability was evidenced by the field-test panel's conclusions regarding the clarity, simplicity, and readability of the survey itself. To the extent that the list of assistance needs might be considered additive indicators of an underlying construct, measures of

internal consistency would be appropriate. Accordingly, a Cronbach's Alpha was computed as .74 for the OCCURRED scale. By similar reasoning, the IMPACT scale is also not additive for the purposes of this analysis and the contention of reliability is based on mechanical stability, and accuracy of memory. To the extent that the items could be considered additive indicators of a single construct, internal consistency is an appropriate measure of reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha computed for the IMPACT scale was .88. For the frequency of occurrence scale on the events section, the Cronbach's Alpha was .68. For the impact scale on the events section, Cronbach's Alpha was .92.

Population and Sample

The population for the study was all beginning vocational teachers in the United States for school year 1989-90. The decision was made to select a stratified random sample from 15 states based on the state population as a proportion of total national population.

States were ranked by population based on 1980 census data. The states were divided into quintiles of 10 states each from largest to smallest. From each quintile, three states were selected by use of a table of random numbers for a total of 15 states. State directors of vocational education assisted us in securing lists of mailing addresses for all of their states' "first year vocational teachers." The preset number of teachers needed from each of the

selected states was then randomly selected from the respective mailing lists.

Using the tables for sample size in Hinkle, Oliver, & Hinkle (1985), with alpha = .05, effect size = .10, and power = .95, the required sample size for a two-tailed one-sample survey would be 325. We elected to over-sample based on the assumption of less than 100% response rate, so the sample size was set at 500. The number of teachers needed from each of the selected states to produce that number of teachers was determined based on the proportion of the state's population to the total population in the 15 selected states in 1980. From the initial response, we found that as many as 25% of the teachers had been incorrectly identified as "first year teachers." To correct for that problem, an additional 125 teachers were selected using the same procedures as before and surveys were mailed within two weeks of the first mailing. Thus, our total sample size was 625.

Data Collection

The survey instrument and a cover letter explaining the study, were mailed to the beginning teachers in Spring, 1990. Using Dillman's Total Design Method (Dillman, 1978), we conducted three mail follow-ups. A total response of rate of 76.3% (n = 477) was achieved. The first question asked the teacher to indicate whether he or she was actually a first year teacher. Persons who answered "no" were instructed to return the uncompleted survey. In general,

the "no" respondents explained that they were new to the subject, school, school district, or even state, but were not actually "beginning teachers." Of the responses returned, 26% indicated they were not first year teachers. Thus, the number of usable responses was 352 which met the required sample (325) for the study.

Unfortunately, by the time mailing lists were secured and the data collection was complete, the school year was over in part of the states selected. Because of Privacy Act concerns, the schools could not provide home addresses or telephone numbers of the non-respondents, so telephone follow-up was impossible. A comparison of the demographics of the early and late responders, as suggested by Miller and Smith (1983), failed to show any significant differences.

Findings

Involvement in Induction Assistance programs.

One of the initial considerations was whether the beginning vocational teachers were being served by any sort of induction assistance program, and in particular whether mentor teachers were assigned to help them. Table 1 indicates that only 25.5% (88/345) of beginning vocational teachers were involved in assistance programs but that slightly over half reported having a mentor or buddy teacher assigned ([63+131]/345 = 56.2%). Only 18.3% of beginning vocational teachers (63/345) were being served both by a mentor/buddy and an organized assistance program, while 36.5% (126/345) were receiving neither form of assistance.

Table 1
Availability of Assigned Mentors and Induction Assistance Programs for Beginning Vocational Teachers in the United States, 1988-1989.

			TEC	NTEC	TOTALS
BTP YES	Mentor/Buddy Assigned	YES	35	28	63
		NO	10	15	25
		SUBTOTAL	45	43	88
BTP NO	Mentor/Buddy Assigned	YES	60	71	131
		NO	91	35	126
		SUBTOTAL	151	106	257
		TOTALS	196	149	345

Notes: BTP — Involved in beginning teacher program? (Yes/No)

TEC — Teacher Education Certified.

NTEC — Non-Teacher Education Certified.

* — Missing data on 7, N = 352

For the teachers who entered the profession through an alternative route (vocational certification based on occupational experience or a technical degree) the picture is somewhat brighter. A total of 66.4% ([28+71]/149) of

these teachers reported an assigned mentor/buddy teacher and 28.8% (43/149) were involved in some sort of beginning teacher program. Only 18.8% (28/149) were involved with both an assistance program and an assigned mentor/buddy, while 23.5% (35/109) had neither.

Types and Impact of assistance experiences

Table 2 reveals the listing of assistance needs that were identified by the qualitative examination of the Nominal Group results and validated by the three panels. The percent of the respondents who had received each form of assistance is indicated as the Percent Reporting. Examination of their responses indicates the most frequently reported form of assistance was feedback and evaluation from the principal (76.7%). The least frequently reported form of assistance was a teacher's aide for the beginning teacher.

The Mean Impact Rating provides a measure of the degree to which each of the assistance needs was considered important by the national sample of beginning vocational teachers. The two items with the highest impact rating overall both dealt with curriculum (provision of adequate materials, textbooks, and workbooks and availability of curriculum guides. The lowest rated item was orientation to the vocational student organization, (see Table 2).

Table 2
Percent of Beginning Vocational Teachers Reporting the Occurrence and Mean Perceived Impact Ratings of Various Forms of Induction Assistance. (N = 352)

	Percent Reporting	Mean Impact Rating
Planning time was available before school started.	66.8	2.72
Extra duties (bus, etc.) reduced for beginning teachers.	36.2	2.09
A mentor or buddy teacher was provided.	60.0	2.49
An orientation on school policies was given.	71.8	2.59
Curriculum guides are available for my program area.	75.1	3.01
Time was available to observe other teachers teaching.	30.4	2.11
An orientation tour of school facilities was given.	55.7	2.01
A workshop for new teachers was held	57.9	2.30
A Vocational Student Organization orientation was held.	18.1	1.72
An in-service on counseling students was provided.	16.2	2.10
An in-service on classroom management was provided.	31.5	2.41
An in-service to explain the curriculum was provided.	20.0	2.32
An inservice on time and stress management was provided.	24.2	2.16
Extra planning period was provided for beginning teachers.	19.8	2.54
My principal provided helpful evaluation and feedback.	76.7	2.78
Information on purchasing supplies/equipment was provided.	55.2	2.61
Adequate materials, textbooks, & workbooks are provided.	65.3	3.06
My students' parents provide support for my program.	52.5	2.49
A list of available resources and vendors was provided.	46.7	2.45
A beginning teachers' handbook was provided.	50.0	2.34
Clerical support was provided for beginning teachers.	46.3	2.50
A teacher's aide was provided to beginning teachers.	14.7	2.03

BTP involved in beginning teacher program? (Yes/No)
TEC Teacher Education Certified.
NTEC Non-Teacher Education Certified.
Rating Scale: 0=none,1=minor,2=moderate,3=major,4=critical

Given that 2.0 is the mid-range of the scale, 21 of the 22 items were rated to have moderate to major impact. It is interesting to note that the assignment of a mentor or buddy teacher was rated only as a moderate impact item overall.

A comparison of the two columns of data, in Table 2, shows that the assistance items rated as "major" impact (2.5 or higher) were also among the most frequently reported. Of the eight items rated at impact = 2.5 or higher, six were reported to have occurred by over half of the respondents. Only one of those major impact items (extra planning period for beginning teachers) was reported at a rate substantially below the rest, at 19.8%.

Frequency and Impact of Positive Experiences

Positive experiences (see Table 3) of the beginning vocational teacher occurred much more frequently than negative experiences (see Table 4). Events that happened frequently are items that reflect a feeling of accomplishment such as experiencing satisfaction when an activity succeeded or being in control and having confidence. Most teachers felt that their principals supported them most of the time (Impact = 3.3), yet their perceptions about how often they received positive feedback from their principals ranked a mean of 2.8. The event that occurred most frequently among these teachers was also the event that received the highest impact rating: the satisfaction that occurs when an activity succeeds.

Table 3
Beginning Vocational Teachers Report of Mean Occurrence and Mean Impact Ratings of Positive Experiences (N = 352)

Positive Experiences	Mean Frequency Rating	Mean Impact Rating
1. I experience satisfaction when an activity succeeds.	3.5	3.7
2. My principal supports me.	3.3	3.2
3. I feel self-confident in my classroom teaching.	3.3	3.1
4. I feel in control of my program.	3.3	3.0
5. I see my students succeeding in my class.	3.3	2.9
6. Students act with respect toward me.	3.2	3.0
7. My students show pride in their accomplishments.	3.2	2.8
8. The subject matter I teach is already familiar to me.	3.1	3.3
9. My peers act with respect toward me.	3.1	3.2
10. I have obtained the goals that I set for myself.	3.1	2.8
11. I receive positive feedback from my students.	3.1	2.5
12. My job allows me to be creative.	3.0	3.1
13. Job tasks that I am doing are already familiar to me.	3.0	2.9
14. I receive positive feedback from my peers.	3.0	2.8
15. I see my students working to have a better future.	3.0	2.5
16. I receive expression of gratitude from my students.	2.9	2.4
17. I receive positive feedback from my principal.	2.8	2.3
18. I am taking classes to further my education.	2.7	2.7
19. I have had success using new teaching approaches.	2.7	2.6
20. The curriculum guides for my program are helpful.	2.6	2.3
21. Local businesses provide support for my program.	2.5	2.0
22. My students participate in vocational club activities (DECA, FBLA, FFA, FHA, HERO, TSA, VICA, etc.).	2.3	2.0
23. I receive help from my local vocational supervisor or director.	2.3	1.8
24. I receive help from my state vocational supervisor.	2.0	1.4

Frequency: 0=Never, 1=Rarely, 2=Occasionally, 3=Often, 4=Always
Impact: 0=None, 1=Minor, 2=Moderate, 3=Major, 4=Critical

It is interesting to observe that the items that had the largest differences between the frequency of occurrence and the impact means, tended to relate mostly to students

(see items 5, 6, 10, 14, and 15 on Table 3 and curiously these events had less impact than frequency. Events occurring less frequently were support from the local business community, student participation in student organizations (which both were rated as having a moderate impact or importance), and help from the local vocational administrator and state vocational supervisor. All items, except the last two, on this scale rated moderate to high major impact.

Frequency and Impact of Negative Experiences

As previously mentioned the negative experiences occurred less often and tended to have a lower overall impact than the positive experiences. Only one event was identified as happening often and that was "having more work than time." This item also had the highest impact of all negative events. Fourteen of the negative events were perceived to happen in the frequency range of occasionally to often, with student related negative events and lack of supplies and equipment leaning more toward the often end of the scale. There were only six events that were perceived by the beginning teachers to have a moderate to major impact with five of the events (2, 3, 4, 5, and 8) leaning more toward the moderate point in the scale (see Table 4).

Table 4
Beginning Vocational Teachers Report of Mean Occurrence and Mean Impact Ratings of Negative Experiences
(N = 352)

Negative Experiences	Mean Frequency Rating	Mean Impact Rating
1. I have more work to do than I have time to do it.	3.0	2.9
2. My students display a lack of self-discipline.	2.9	2.3
3. My student act unmotivated towards my subject area.	2.9	2.0
4. I have insufficient funds for supplies and equipment.	2.8	2.1
5. My students do not receive their parents' support at school (home-work, after-school activities, etc.).	2.7	2.1
6. My class sizes are not appropriate for my subject.	2.6	1.6
7. I run into problems because I do not have adequate equipment.	2.5	1.9
8. I have to do recruitment activities for my program.	2.4	2.2
9. I run into problems because I do not have adequate facilities (classroom, lab, etc).	2.4	1.7
10. I run into problems because I do not have adequate curriculum materials.	2.4	1.7
11. My program is misunderstood by others (such as parents, students, counselors, administrators).	2.3	1.8
12. I have trouble making and sequencing lesson plans.	2.3	1.6
13. My home life is negatively affected because of my school work.	2.2	1.4
14. I run into problems because my administrator does not give clear job expectations.	2.1	1.2
15. I run into problems because of my poor organizational skills.	2.0	1.2
16. I experience problems because I don't understand school policies or procedures.	1.9	1.3
17. I am compared to the former teacher in this program.	1.8	1.6

Frequency: 0=Never,1=Rarely,2=Occasionally,3=Often,4=Always
Impact: 0=None, 1=Minor, 2=Moderate, 3=Major, 4=Critical

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

In spite of the growing recognition of the importance of induction assistance programs for beginning teachers, vocational teachers are generally not being served by such programs. Slightly more non-teacher education certified than teacher-education certified teachers are involved in beginning teacher assistance programs. Even with those, however, the proportion being assisted is dismally low.

Even the most fundamental induction assistance needs are not being met by an alarming proportion of beginning vocational teachers. Provision of a curriculum guide for organizing a course that one has never taught seems so basic, that it is disappointing to find almost a quarter of beginning vocational teachers not receiving one. By the end of the first year of teaching, one should reasonably expect the school principal to have visited a beginning teacher's class and provided evaluation and feedback. Even that was lacking for almost one-fourth of the respondents.

In general, the types of assistance that beginning teachers regard as important tend to be the ones that are most frequently experienced. There are two possible explanations: (1) the higher impact rating is an artifact of the frequency with which it is experienced, or (2) the more important forms of assistance are correctly perceived and provided more consistently. We would prefer to believe the latter, but have no evidence in that direction.

It was encouraging to find that among the positive and negative experiences identified through our group sessions and the literature, positive events were occurring more often than negative events. And, overall the positive events appeared to have more of an impact on the teachers than the negative events. Perhaps this is what encourages those who do remain in teaching.

More often than not, beginning vocational teachers who have an assigned mentor or buddy teacher are not involved in any other form of organized induction assistance. It would appear that many administrators who are responsible for beginning vocational teachers at least recognize the importance of providing some sort of help to them. Assigning a mentor is a low cost step that can be taken with little involvement on the part of the administrator and without the necessity of developing and funding a broader induction assistance program. Unfortunately there may be little relationship between having a mentor/buddy assigned and actually receiving assistance.

Assignment of a mentor or "buddy" teacher is an important positive step in helping a novice teacher survive the induction process. There is a growing literature on how mentors should be selected and trained and on the kinds of things they should be called upon to do. On the other hand, simply assigning a mentor to the novice does not replace a structured induction assistance program. Moreover, it does

not absolve school administrators of further responsibility to provide support and assistance to beginning teachers.

Recommendations

Leaders in vocational education should become more familiar with the literature regarding induction assistance. They should make a more concerted effort to provide the kinds of assistance beginning vocational teachers need to be successful during the first year or years of teaching.

Most vocational courses are not organized around the content of a textbook. On the other hand, it is likely that curriculum guides and instructional materials do exist for virtually any vocational program. In the case of the respondents to this survey, perhaps the guides and materials were actually available, but the beginning teachers simply were never informed of their existence or were not told how to secure them--in which case they might as well not have existed at all. If curriculum guides and instructional materials are not available within the local school system, they are available somewhere. The beginning vocational teacher does not have the experience to know where to look or who to call.

School administrators and vocational education leaders should make certain that beginning vocational teachers are aware of the existence and provided with copies of curriculum guides as well as instructional materials for their courses. The beginning vocational teacher should not be asked to design the course, find the instructional

materials, and provide the instruction without assistance. Activities such as these, result in negative experiences for the beginning teacher.

Beginning vocational teachers need a mass of information, but if all of it is delivered at one time, "information overload" is likely to ensue. Therefore, inservice programs for beginning vocational teachers should be spread out over the year and conducted in "small doses." They should be sequenced in such a way that the most immediate needs are met first. Inservice on the curriculum is needed early as is inservice on school policies and information on purchasing. At least the curriculum inservice should be completed before school starts. Classroom management inservice should be provided early during the year.

Teacher released time is expensive and school budgets are always tight. But, if beginning teachers are to provide quality instruction, they need more planning time than experienced teachers do. That is particularly true of beginning vocational teachers because of the time necessary to purchase laboratory supplies, maintain equipment, and practice teacher-skills for demonstrations. First year vocational teachers should be given an extra planning period--if not for the entire year, at least for half of the year.

Vocational administrators should be knowledgeable of the experiences that beginning teachers perceive as positive

and important to them. They should create an environment which provides these experiences and eliminate as much as possible the negative events that can be stumbling blocks to their successes.

A Final Comment

Induction programs built on accurate research can lead to the retention of quality teachers who otherwise may get discouraged and leave the profession before they fully reach the "impact" stage of teaching. The kind of quantitative research reported here should be balanced and combined with ongoing qualitative examinations of the induction process for beginning vocational teachers. It is through a broad-based approach that an empirically sound and structured program for the professional development of beginning vocational teachers can be built.

We believe that the results of this national survey support the information that we have gathered through qualitative techniques. Even though an enormous volume of data were collected through interviews, daily logs, group sessions, and instrumentation, this survey gave us additional evidence that we have an accurate research base upon which to build a solid beginning vocational teacher induction program.

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